

Mass of Reparation on the observance of Roe v. Wade
1/22/16
Friday of the Second Week of the Year

The first reading, from the First Book of Samuel, recounts a poignant encounter between Saul and David. (I Sam. 24.3-21) At that moment they, who were once allies, had fallen into a deadly jealous rivalry. Saul, the jealous king, was the hunter. David was the hunted. Saul had ventured out of his palace with three thousand of his men to find and kill David. David and his small band of followers were so frightened; they had hidden in a cave.

Fate it seemed was very favorable to David as Saul unwittingly entered into the same cave not knowing his prey lurked inside. Destiny seemed to have given David the upper hand. Even David's own men urged him to take advantage of the moment and slay his mortal foe. It would have been seen as self-defense, a justifiable act taken against a powerful adversary. David hesitated. He restrained his military impulses. He let Saul leave the dark cave and return to the light of day unaware of the danger he had escaped.

The cave is a powerful metaphor for this story. In the darkness of the cave, David's actions were hidden. It was so dark that David could stealthily creep up on Saul and cut the tassel of his cloak. Though his actions were hidden from the world, David was painfully aware that neither his actions nor his thoughts were hidden from God. He could not do what he originally intended and his followers encouraged, because there was a light upon him and a light within him. The light of God's face was gazing at him. The light of God's goodness was burning inside him. At that moment, his followers could not see the light. They only saw the easy opportunity to get rid of Saul. Their fear or their hatred for Saul blinded them to the light, which at that moment only David could see.

Moments later, after Saul wandered back to his troops, David steps out of the cave with the portion of Saul's cloak he had cut, and shouted after Saul bringing to light what had been hidden in darkness. He spoke of his reasons and the reverence with

which he still regarded Saul. In that instance, Saul saw himself, not just in the light of day, but in the light of God's gaze. He also saw David in this same light. He knew then that David would be king. Even though his military forces were still greater than those of David, Saul recognized that David had acted in mercy, in God's mercy.

The light of which David was so keenly aware is the light of conscience. Conscience is personal but it is not private. Conscience is never alone. Conscience is that innate awareness of God's presence. God is personally present to each one of us. This is what gives conscience its power, at times its sting, at other times its consolation, and still other times a deep conviction. God is present to us. God is speaking to us. The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls Conscience the human person's "most secret core", a "sanctuary". In that sanctuary we are not by ourselves. It is the sanctuary of our sacred relationship with the creator. It is a relational as well as a personal space. The sanctuary of conscience is full of light, full of the light of God's mercy.

We can sometimes deceive ourselves. We may sometimes suffer from ignorance, a lack of knowledge, or fear. That is why a good conscience must also be well-formed and well-informed. A good conscience develops healthy habits. A good conscience must also act in communion, because a good conscience knows we never act alone. Even as David followed his own conscience, he knew that God was at his side.

David's God was also the God of Saul. He is the one God of all his children so the merciful God who comes to us in the sanctuary of our conscience is the same God who calls us to a communion of life with one another. Conscience should not divide us. It should unite us. As St. Paul reminds us, "you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4.4-6)

Today's story in the first reading is a sober, healthy reminder as we prayerfully observe the sad anniversary of the Supreme Court's abortion decision, *Roe v. Wade*. Much can be made of personal conscience that distorts its true meaning and destroys

human lives. A libertarian mood has hijacked the religious and relational nature of conscience, creating a lonely room, a cave where thoughts and actions like those of abortion hope to never see the light of day.

There is a light in the room. It may be hidden. It may be under a bushel basket. We must remind one another and others, especially young women and men, that a merciful God is there to help you see the light. That kind, merciful light is not to be feared. The example of David in his conversation with Saul is a good example of courage and kindness crafted by the mercy of God.

The dismal persistent conflict over the dignity of the unborn child has poisoned social discourse and still tears at the social fabric. Even our voices in the pro-life movement can succumb to the bitter adversarial polemic that creates lots of heat but little light. We do well to seek strength from that sacred sanctuary of life, our own conscience where God's mighty and merciful voice can form us and inform us. When we speak with his voice, his mercy will resonate in core of those hearts who feel alone. It will echo in those sad souls who have been embittered. It will shake those inner spirits that have become indifferent. It will even speak to the child in the sanctuary of the womb. This voice, this merciful voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd will call them out of darkness into the wonderful light of life.